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**IS THE  
RUSSIAN REVOLUTION  
A  
BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION?**

**A  
KEEN  
ANALYSIS  
OF SITUATION  
IN SOVIET RUSSIA**



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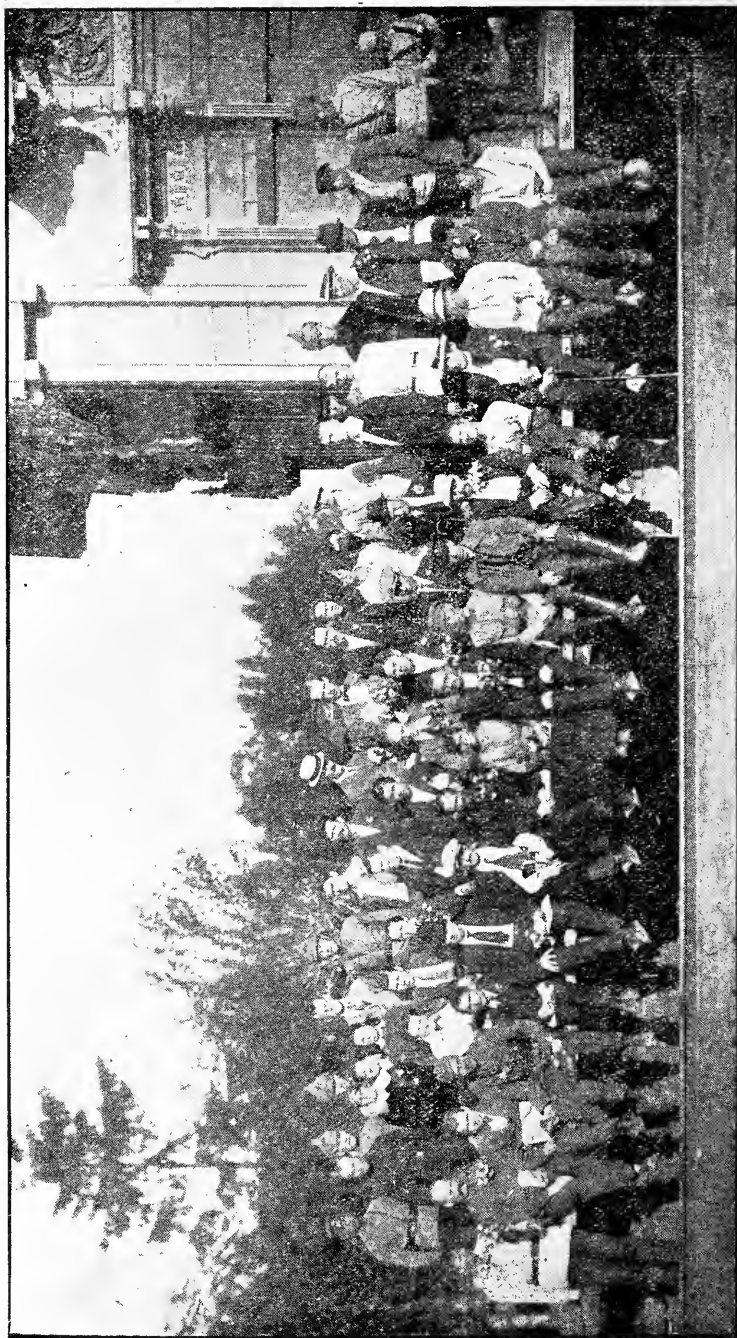
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Delegates to the Third Congress in company with students and officers of the Red Army.

# Is The Russian Revolution A Bourgeois Revolution?

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In 1905-1906, after the first Russian Revolution, the question as to the social character and the part to be played by the next Russian Revolution was of great importance in the process of self-determination of the labor movement. The questions asked were: "Will it be a bourgeois or a proletarian revolution? Which class will lead it if it is to be a bourgeois revolution? What will be the relations of this class to the other classes?"

Even the first revolution had settled many disputes in spite of the fact that it had not reached its goal. Although it was suppressed before it could decide upon vital questions, the questions of power, it became absolutely clear that the bourgeoisie was a counter-revolutionary class which sought to enter into an agreement with the old Czarist regime for the perpetuation of the condition of half serfdom in order to subdue the proletariat. Two classes proved to be revolutionary, the workers and the peasants. The workers were the leaders, the main driving force of the revolution.

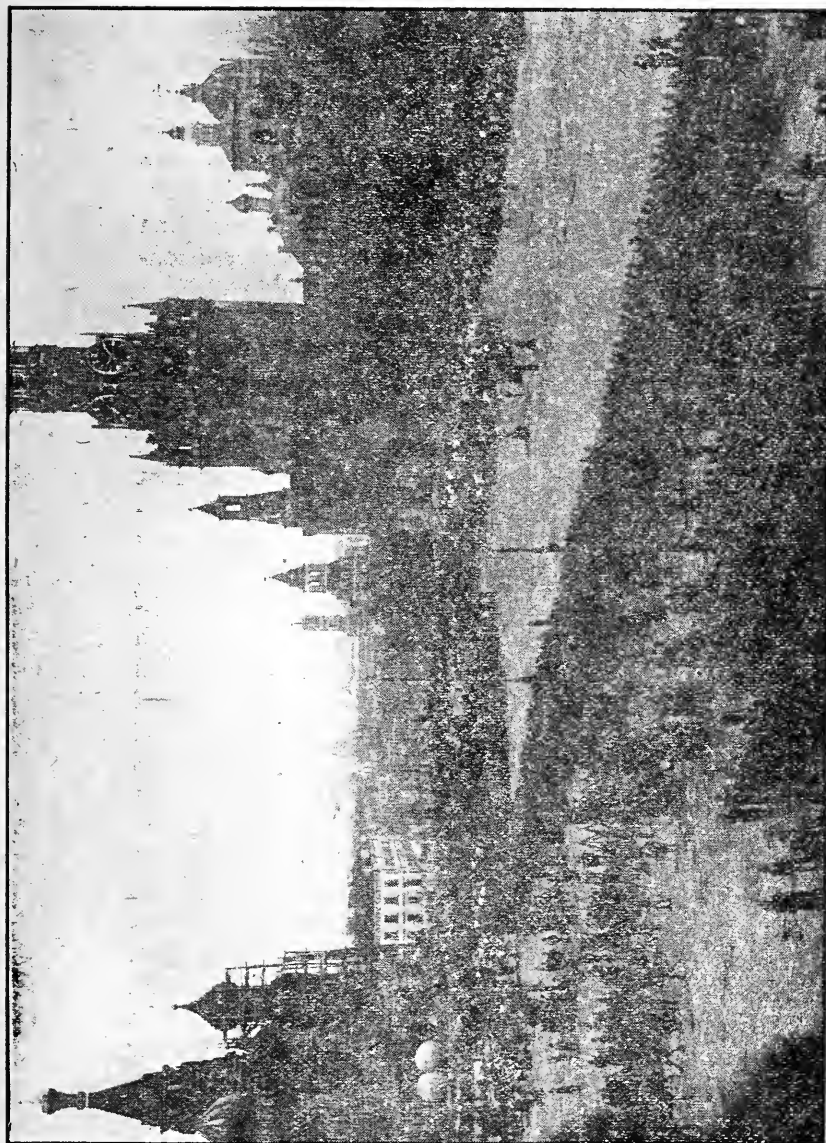
During the decade between the first revolution and that of 1917, the disputes over the character of the revolution gave place to definite questions dealing with the conditions for organizing the working class after the revolution, the question of social changes as a result of the first revolution, and particularly the question dealing with the changes within the working class and with Stolypin's agrarian policy. The March and October revolutions, four

years of Soviet rule and finally our new economic policy have restored the question of the character of our revolution to the order of the day. The Mensheviks and their international friends, the Social-Democrats and Centrists, are madly howling over the new economic policy of the Soviet government, and are putting the following question to us: "Why was all that necessary? Does not the fact that you Bolsheviki are compelled to restore the very capitalism you have destroyed, prove that it was a bourgeois revolution?"

It is necessary to answer this question if we ourselves wish to grasp the meaning of this four years' fight, and the significance of our new policy. Are we actually renouncing the past four years? Is the Russian Revolution a proletarian one or is it a bourgeois revolution?

First of all we must establish certain facts. We designate all the revolutions from the Dutch uprising against Spanish tyranny up to the English and French revolutions, or more strictly speaking, up to the three French revolutions, as bourgeois revolutions, because their result was bourgeois rule, which meant a step towards its universal triumph, and to the bourgeoisie's acquisition of power in all civilized countries. Not one of these revolutions was purely bourgeois; we must take into consideration the classes that participated in them and the goals aimed at by these classes. The large landowning class played a considerable part in the Netherlands and even in the English revolution. Cromwell himself was a large landowner; he was backed by a considerable part of the big English landowners. At the same time, beginning with the English revolution we see that not only did the craftsman, the industrial worker and the young proletarian class which was just coming into existence, participate in the revolutions, but we even notice a strong tendency to exceed the bounds set by the growing capitalist system. The movements of Leweers, Digors and Chiliasten were proletarian democratic movements which





Demonstration in the Red Square in celebration of the opening of the Third Congress of the Communist International.

strove towards instituting the Socialist order and that of collective ownership; they sought the abolition of private property and capitalist competition. Considerable masses participated in these movements. To them Socialism was a religion. Even at that time Socialism represented a danger to the young capitalist order, and the bourgeoisie suppressed it with all the cruelty of which it is capable in defending its interests. Cromwell well understood the conflict between capitalism and this religious Socialism. In his speeches he fought against the latter with the same arguments which the bourgeoisie used against revolutionary Socialism in the 19th century.

During the French revolution and parallel with its development, the Socialist current gained strength in the depths of society; it was then represented by the party of the "Enrages", whose history has not yet been written, but which played a very important part in the events of 1793 (the literature on this party is very poor). Robespierre was an avowed and convinced opponent of this movement. In the pamphlets of the Girondist, Brissot, the representative of the commercial bourgeoisie of southern France, we find not only all the arguments with which the bourgeoisie later fought Socialism, but we also find the mad, raging hatred which is due to the recognition of the power of the Communists in the French revolution. These were backed by a considerable part of those who saved France in 1793.

One of the reasons why the petty-bourgeois democrat Robespierre was overthrown, was that he had lost the working masses of Paris through his campaign against the "Enrages" and their defenders in the Paris Commune, like Chaumette. For the heads of Chaumette and Leroux, Robespierre paid with his own head. After he had lost connection with the working masses he could no longer instil fear into, nor be of any use to the Thermidorists of the young bourgeoisie of the French Revolution, which was gaining ground in the war against the feudal world. When the head of Robespierre fell amid joyous cheers of

the speculators and the "Jeunesse doree", the suburbs of Paris were maliciously silent.

In the revolution of 1789, and still more in the Revolution of 1848, the working class of France together with the artisans who joined it, was already a growing and threatening power which clearly understood the conflict of proletarian and capitalist interests. These masses who were not yet united by industries on a large scale and who did not yet have a party which could unite them by an idea, these masses who fought with a confused idea of the Socialist Republic, were already the driving power and the leaders of the revolution. The defeat of these masses in June was the defeat of the revolution. The bourgeoisie did not develop the revolution after their victory; it was rather the workers who did it. The bourgeoisie ended it and flocked to the standards of Napoleon III.

What is the significance of this historical reminiscence?

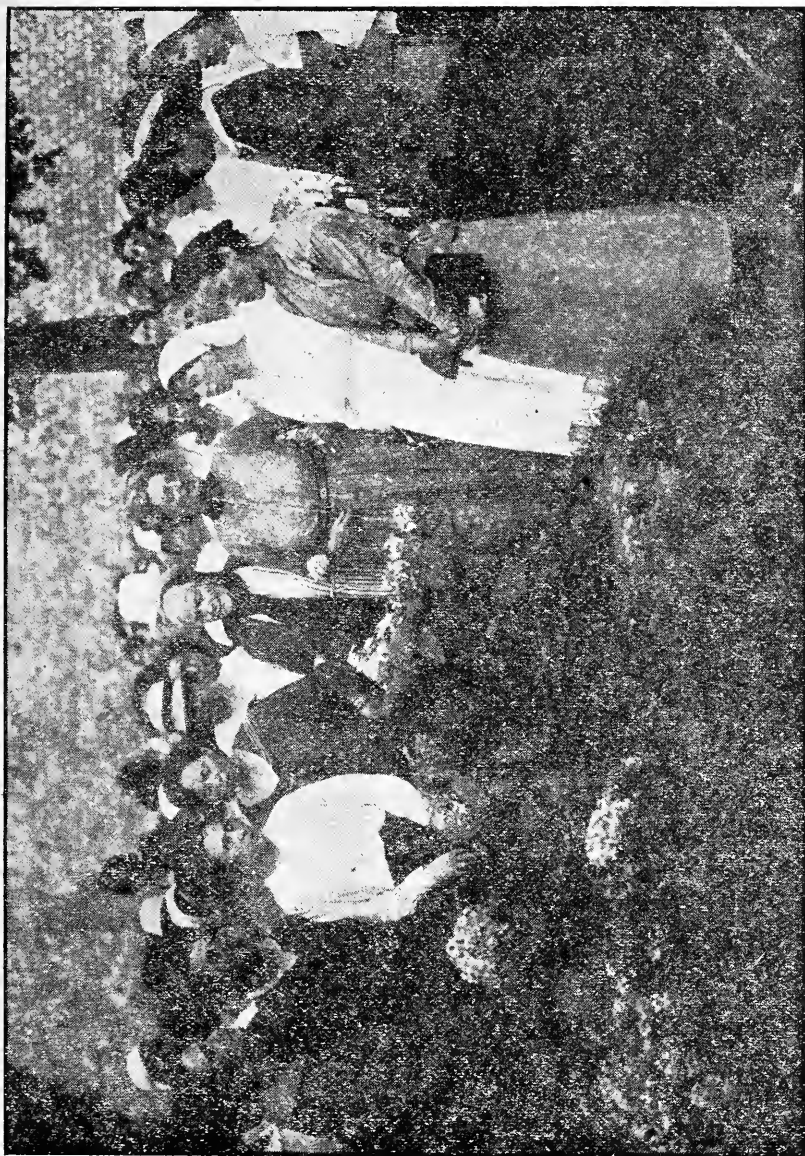
The existence of the bourgeoisie is a necessary condition for a bourgeois revolution. In all bourgeois revolutions, however, the working class stepped into the historical arena together with the bourgeoisie, for there is no bourgeoisie without a working class. At first the working class moved under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. Then, in the process of revolution, it became conscious of the clash of interests between itself and the bourgeoisie. It therefore attempted to exceed the bounds of the French revolution, the aims which the latter set in the fight for the working class and in the struggle for vaguely formulated Socialist principles.

In 1896 Eduard Bernstein, who at that time was still considered a revolutionary Marxist, pointed out in his preface to Heritier's history of the French Revolution of 1848, that, due to the bourgeois character of the revolution, the working class should not have put any demands which exceeded the bounds of the bourgeois order. This

he considered the great error committed by the working class. But the workers did not reduce their demands in the bourgeois revolutions. They understand Bernstein well. What Bernstein told them the representatives of the bourgeoisie socialism are always telling them. The workers could not withdraw their demands because they had come out of cellars and dogs' kennels and dirty workshops. They were suffering and consequently could not calmly look on while the bourgeoisie was reaping the harvest. They had to fight for their own interests and pursue their own aims, because they felt that it was they who had overthrown the old order and that the bourgeoisie only wanted to modify their slavery. They had to go still further, for without doing so they would have been unable to defeat the old order. They succeeded in doing so only because they had exceeded the limits of bourgeois interests. Friedrich Engels was right when he spoke of the historical law, according to which the revolutionary class puts demands to the leaders of a revolution which by far exceed the apparent possibilities of the particular moment, thus making the overthrow of the old order possible. Rosa Luxemburg was also right in her statement that in all bourgeois revolutions it was the proletarian communist efforts of the workers that constituted the power which made the overthrow of feudalism possible.

This recognition of historical tendencies in every bourgeois revolution is a necessary condition for the theoretical comprehension of the fate of the Russian Revolution.

In 1905, when disputes over the character of the Russian Revolution were still going on, Trotzky rightly pointed out that whether we wanted it or not, the working class would exceed the bourgeois limits of the revolution, because it would have to seize power, even though it might do so together with the peasantry, in order to end the bourgeois revolution and in order to overthrow the Czarist regime, and that in order to reach a practical solution in the questions of unemployment and lockouts,



Women delegates to the Third Congress of the Communist International visiting the graves of the revolutionary dead. Clara Zetkin is in the center next to the distinguished looking delegate.

it would have to base and answer these questions upon its own interests, that is, upon Socialism. At that time Karl Kautsky, who now speaks like a Menshevik, agreed with Rosa Luxemburg that the Russian Revolution was at the same time a bourgeois and non-bourgeois or proletarian revolution, because, although it established the capitalist order on the land by leaving the land in the hands of the peasants, it must seek to establish Socialism in the cities. At that time Kautsky said that according to its position in history the Russian Revolution was the transition from the bourgeois to the proletarian revolution.

If the influence of the Russian Revolution was to let loose the revolutionary forces in Europe (and in Western Europe only a proletarian revolution is possible) the Russian Revolution would be compelled to realize Socialism in its own peculiar way.

Ten years after Kautsky had made these observations upon the driving forces of the revolution, the March revolution took place. The leaders of the proletarian vanguard, the Bolsheviks, were well aware of the petty bourgeois character of the Russian industries, and they therefore consciously attempted to limit the aims for which the proletariat fought by placing upon the order of the day, not Socialism, but the transition measures towards Socialism. Lenin's program in April, 1917, had for its aim the bringing of the government machine into the hands of the workers' and the peasants' Soviets, and the nationalization of banks without doing away with private property. Even after the workers and peasants had seized power the Soviet government made no attempt to expropriate the bourgeoisie, but rather to develop and organize the workers' control of industry. The working class, however, proceeded with dynamic force. It seized the factories and nationalized enterprises in the provinces against the will of the central government. This it did, not out of ignorance of the program of the Bolshevik Party, but because of the resistance of the bourgeoisie

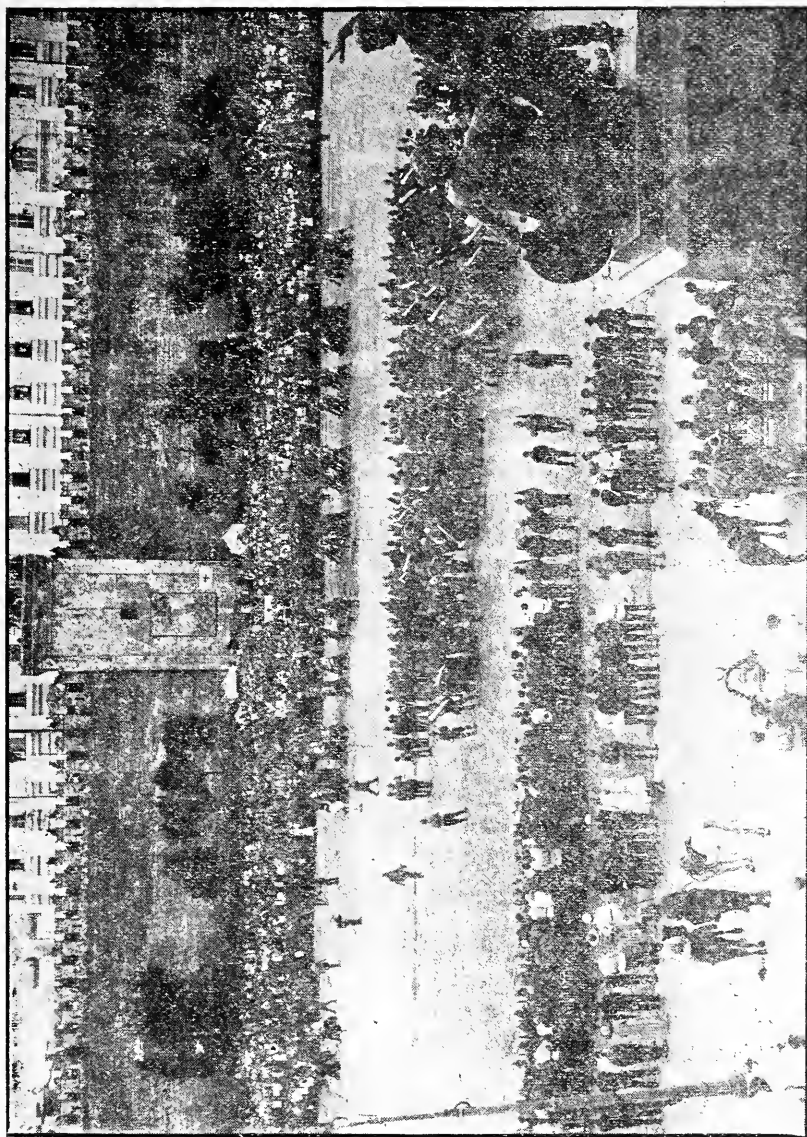
which attempted to sabotage the workers' control or to hide the supplies necessary for running the industries. The workers had to get hold of the bourgeoisie by the neck. Even if there had been no economic necessity for this move, the class which had overthrown the bourgeoisie and had seized power would not have permitted the bourgeoisie to enjoy the possession of the means of production undisturbed. The proletariat ruled in the country and could not possibly have permitted the bourgeoisie to rule on the economic field and live accordingly.

In April, 1918, in a fine speech by Comrade Lenin, the Soviet government attempted to define our next tasks and to point out the way which we now designate as "The new economic policy". It attempted to conclude agreements with the capitalists and to transform private capitalism into capitalism controlled by the proletarian state. Comrade Lenin said that we must learn from the trust kings how to reconstruct our industries. At the same time the Soviet government had to act in just the opposite manner in the country, where the prerequisites for Socialism were not present. In order to obtain grain it had to arm the workers and the village poor, and to form village committees against rent-profiteering. Capitalism which had been destroyed by the war had not left us sufficient means for the exchange of manufactured articles for grain. The Soviet government was not yet sufficiently fortified, and was in control of too weak a machine to be able to get grain by means of the tax in kind. The peasants, who had thrown off the yoke of the large landowners, the Czar and the bourgeoisie with the aid of the workers, wanted no restrictions set upon their freedom. They desired a free stateless life, with no obligations to the workers' and peasants' government. The grain producers were willing to exchange their grain only for the greatest possible part of those goods which were still in the country; this would have injured the state, the working class and the poor villagers.

But the third class, the bourgeoisie, did not want to hear of limitations either. It refused to accept the compromise with the Soviet government, as offered by Lenin in 1918. With the aid of the world bourgeoisie, it had begun the fight for life against Soviet Russia. During the summer of 1918 the united Russian bourgeoisie declared at one time to Lithuania, another time to Poland, a third time to Esthonia, then to the Ukraine and Germany, respectively, that thanks to the protection of German imperialism it was not compelled to accept the compromise with the Soviet government. After the Czecho-Slovak uprising, particularly after the Allies had defeated Germany, the Russian bourgeoisie, basing its hopes upon aid from the Allies, started the most bitter struggle against the Soviet government. It refused to lease its enterprises because it hoped to retain them as its property. In order to make it possible, therefore, to carry out the new economic policy, it was necessary to knock the bourgeoisie down, not only in law, but in fact. It had to be knocked on the head in a two years' war.

We had to prove to the bourgeoisie and to world capital that the Russian industries belonged to the proletarian state and not the bourgeoisie. We had to do this before we could make use of the bourgeoisie in the further development of production. The war inevitably brought about a complete nationalization. This nationalization was brought about not only by the necessity of destroying the ruling class and ending its political power, which was based upon economic power; we had to nationalize for other reasons also. We had to nationalize because it would otherwise have been impossible to carry on the war begun by the bourgeoisie. Our unlimited centralization was nothing more than the stripping of the whole country in order to obtain all the industrial products necessary for carrying on war. As Comrade Lenin rightly states in his pamphlet on the tax in kind, the military measures led to military Communism in the cities, and to requisitioning in the country, that is, to grain-plundering





Representatives of the world's working class being greeted by the world's first  
Workers' Republic.

for the support of the army and the cities. Was there any other possibility of getting a sufficient amount of metal and of grain which we needed for the war? We could not possibly have left our limited stores of manufactured goods to the discretion of the speculators. And how could we possibly have left grain to be taken care of by the tax in kind, when we lacked the necessary government apparatus for computing this tax correctly? The grain stores of Central Russia (until 1919 Siberia and the Ukraine did not belong to us) were so small that it was not possible to obtain any surplus whatever; moreover, the peasants could receive nothing in return for this surplus on the free market, if there was any, because all the manufactured goods were confiscated.

Outside of the political, strategic and economic necessity for the policy of war Communism, there was another social-psychological factor. If even at the beginning of the revolution the victor class could not leave the material sources in the hands of their enemy and thus enable the bourgeoisie to lead a life of luxury in a legal manner, how then could the proletariat have possibly done this at a time when Russia was one big battlefield, when the workers and peasants had to undergo so much suffering in order to be victorious in their fight against the bourgeoisie? Was it possible, at a time when the hungry and freezing women workers were sewing coats for the army day and night and under poor light, to permit beautifully lit and rich displays in the stores to mock the suffering fighters by showing them how well the bourgeoisie lived and enjoyed life? This was impossible! The Soviet government had to institute the Spartan manner of living, because it was the only one which corresponded to the gray soldier coat of Soviet Russia.

War Communism was a contradiction to the structure of Russia and its economic relations. War Communism was a contradiction as far as the land was concerned; in the cities, however, the possibility of success was not alto-

gether excluded. If the world revolution had come as early as 1910, before the disarming of the European working class took place, or even in 1920, during our advance towards Warsaw, the reconstruction of the Russian large industries as a whole on the basis of state ownership and according to our economic plans would not have been historically impossible. The Soviet government could then have thought of retaining the large industries as a whole in its own hands, because it could have received the necessary machines from the European workers. Even in case the world revolution had not been victorious on a European scale, even if we had only conquered Poland and then stood armed at the gates of Germany, it would not have been altogether impossible to force the bourgeoisie to accept a compromise with us after we would have gotten the means of production from the world bourgeoisie for our industries in European Russia, in return for concessions in the bordering regions of Russia,—Siberia, Caucasus and Turkestan—and for the right to develop production in these distant regions on the basis of concessions.

What would then have been the social relations in Russia under such circumstances? All the industries and means of transportation would have been in the hands of the workers. The land would have been in the hands of the peasants. The reconstructed industries would have made it possible for the proletariat to relinquish the requisitions in the country, and to receive grain partly through the tax in kind and partly by exchanging goods with the state industries. This would have been no Communism, but it would have been the most significant step in the transition towards Socialism; it would have led the way towards great progress in electrification, and towards creating the necessary conditions for the advance of the peasantry towards a higher collectivistic system of production.

In this we did not succeed. The long-drawn-out civil war has weakened us economically. Now that it is at an end we cannot proceed in industrial production, although our compromise with the world bourgeoisie is advantageous to us. The uncertainty of our foreign relations gave the bourgeoisie the opportunity of getting greater concessions from us and of starting the negotiations for concessions under conditions which were less favorable to us. We must therefore first permit the restoration of the small and middle sized industries on the basis of lease. This will of course restore a part of the Russian bourgeoisie. We are compelled to grant concessions under less favorable conditions. We must grant concessions in Central Russia; we must permit foreign capital to start those factories running which are already there, instead of developing those productive sources which have not yet been used. Our present task is to retain the main industrial undertakings in the hands of the workers' government. We are consciously preparing ourselves for co-operating with the bourgeoisie; this is undoubtedly dangerous to the existence of the Soviet government, because the latter loses the monopoly on industrial production as against the peasantry.

Does not this signify the decisive victory of Capitalism? May we not then speak of our revolution as having lost its revolutionary character? Were all our efforts and the whole three years' struggle a futile sacrifice?

We shall begin with this last question. The whole course of development has shown that the bourgeoisie would not have had to become our lessees, if we had not beaten them on the economic field, if we had not expropriated them, because they were owners of the means of production. If we had not beaten them there would be no talk of concessions. But if, as we have said, our economic policy of 1920 was necessary for our victory, it was also a necessary condition for our new economic policy.

How has our new economic policy affected class relations? In the country, our policy of requisitioning could only have been a transition policy. Even in case the world proletariat had been victorious we would have relinquished it. On the industrial field our present concessions are only temporary transition concessions; by this we certainly do not mean that at the end of a year we shall again confiscate the newly accumulated goods. Our economic policy is based upon a longer period of time, but it is a transition policy nevertheless. Our goal remains the same—the industries in the hands of the workers' government. But just at present the government industries constitute only a part of the total industries; they only form a narrow foundation for the proletarian government. What does that mean? It means that we have retreated; that we are holding those positions only which are necessary to maintain the power of the workers and peasants.

Does that signify that the revolution is a non-Socialist one? No! It only signifies that the victorious working class is not able to carry out its program completely, not even that program which in Russia, a petty-bourgeois country, seems theoretically possible. But the class which must retreat because of the great resistance of the other classes, in our case because of the resistance of world capitalism which is not yet overthrown, does not cease to be the victorious class, the ruling class. When the Czarist regime, which was a government of large landowners, was compelled to make concessions to capitalism, so that the bourgeoisie became the ruling economic class, Czarism itself did not cease to exist and the large landowning class did not cease to be the ruling political class; neither did Russia cease to be a country of half-serfdom. Should the bourgeoisie of Europe attempt to hinder the revolution by submitting to state capitalism and even to workers' control, it will not cease to be the ruling class. We now come to the last question. It is not a question of the character of our revolution. The revolution was consummated by the working class

and will go down in the annals of history as a Socialist revolution, even though the Russian working class may temporarily be defeated. We are rather speaking of the outcome, the result of the revolution.

Will the Bolsheviki retain their power under the conditions of the partial restoration of capitalism and the production of goods by the peasants? Our enemies point out that economic relations determine the political ones, and that economic concessions like the ones we grant to the bourgeoisie, must lead to political concessions.

This so-called Marxian ABC has nothing in common with Marxism, because it is abstract and considers neither time nor space. Should world capitalism constantly gain power in the course of many years, and the revolution constantly weaken, then the working class must in the long run be defeated. But when a large landowning class in Russia made economic concessions to the bourgeoisie, it nevertheless continued in power for quite a long time. It is true that the economic concessions were followed by political concessions and finally by the capitulation of the large landowning class. But the reason for this lies in the fact that the large landowning class was the end of a decaying branch of development; it was a dying class. From this point of view the bourgeoisie is the historically deteriorating, dying class. That is why the working class of Russia can refuse to make political concessions to the bourgeoisie; since it is justified in hoping that its power will grow on a national and international scale more quickly than will the power of the Russian bourgeoisie.

The history of the Russian revolution establishes the fact that it was the first Socialist and the first proletarian revolution. It is a proletarian revolution in a petty bourgeois country. For this reason it will distinguish itself from the proletarian revolutions in countries like England and America by the fact that after a long struggle, followed by the seizure of power, the working class of

these countries will be able to carry out their programs much more quickly than we have been. Ours is a proletarian revolution which under unfavorable inner and outer conditions advances like every other revolution. But it is a proletarian, a Socialist revolution; the tradition of October is the program of the world revolution.

October is not the anniversary of the Comedy of Errors in which, as the Mensheviki claim, the working class unconsciously became the tool of another class. It is the anniversary of the beginning of the great international proletarian revolution. Even now when we are fighting in our defensive positions we count the sacrifices of our struggle and can say with absolute conviction and ease, "We followed the right in October and the victory is ours."



## *The Author*

Radek is a member of the Central Executive Committee of the Russian Communist Party and of the Third International. Still a young man, he is a seasoned veteran in the labor movement and one of the most powerful and striking figures in the Russian revolution. He was born in Galicia. Radek's specialty is the international phases of the Communist movement and a dreaded opponent in debate. A favorite pastime of his is to show delegates from



**Radek.**

various countries how much more he knows about their own labor movements than they do. He has, as usual, command of several languages. As a speaker he is particularly forceful, although not eloquent. I considered it a real compliment to him when a couple of interpreters who were translating for the English section complained that they had to take down almost verbatim what he said, whereas they could let other speakers ramble along for ten minutes at a time without making any notes.

**WILLIAM Z. FOSTER.**



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